

VZCZCXYZ0008
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #0110/01 0230949
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 230949Z JAN 08
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7971
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7768
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9028

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000110

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave significant coverage January 23 to the slide of global stock markets, including Taiwan's, after the U.S. Federal Reserve's interest-rate cut failed to persuade investors that the U.S. economy will avert a recession. News coverage also focused on the March presidential election and the UN referendum. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou's pledge Tuesday to increase Taiwan's military budget and to continue arms procurement from the United States if he is elected president in March. The article criticized the Blue camp's "despicable" mentality, because it had sought strongly to block the arms procurement budgets proposed by the DPP administration. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," written by Kurt Campbell, chief executive officer and cofounder of the Center for a New American Security, discussed the common yet different experiences that democracies such as the United States and Taiwan share. The article concluded by saying that "as presidential campaigning continues in the US and Taiwan, it is important to keep these common political experiences in mind while both sides negotiate a complex future together." End summary.

A) "Ma Ying-jeou Reveals Some Information"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (1/23):

"Ma Ying-jeou said yesterday while attending a luncheon party with some retired military leaders that [if elected] he will maintain sufficient military readiness and will not call a halt to [Taiwan's] arms purchases from the United States. Ma also said the [government's] national defense budget will return to the level [that it was] under the KMT's governance, and that he will use the island's strong national defense as a foundation for peace across the Taiwan Strait.

"We feel reassured after listening to Ma's statements. Ma used to adopt a very ambiguous attitude toward national defense: He has never expressed opposition to the Blue legislators' intense moves to block the arms procurement budget in the Legislative Yuan, and there was once when he even said flightily that his arms procurement policy was to buy fast-drying cement [for Taiwan]. [Ma's attitude] made people suspect that he was seeking deliberately to weaken and sacrifice [Taiwan's] military in order to pave the way for unification [with China]. The question is: If Ma is really intent to maintain a strong military, why did the Blue camp fight so vigorously against the arms procurements and the national defense budget when the DPP was the ruling party?

"It was fortunate that the United States was there [for Taiwan]; or else, should Ma and the Blue camp be held responsible if the People Liberation Army attacked Taiwan and our military failed to stand its strike? [The KMT] boycotted national defense [budgets] while its

rival party ruled, and it seeks to resume Taiwan's military buildup when it becomes the ruling party. No democratic country in the world would joke with its national security in this way. Ma's remarks have unconsciously revealed the despicable mentality of the Blue camp!"

B) "Common yet Different Democracies"

Kurt Campbell, chief executive officer and cofounder of the Center for a New American Security, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (1/23):

"... There has been extensive discussion of late of a worrisome drift in the US-Taiwan relationship and there are indeed signs of discord and clear areas for worry. ... These instances of disagreement and discord take place amid the background of China's dramatic rise to great power status. It is undeniable that China now plays a much larger role in Washington's calculation on virtually every matter of global importance, from North Korean nuclear weapons to currency woes to energy anxieties to unrest in Pakistan. The US now needs a constructive partnership with China as never before, which has resulted in Taiwan feeling increasingly squeezed by the growing weight of China in all matters of international diplomacy and commerce.

"Nevertheless, what is often forgotten behind the banal bromides that celebrate the vibrancy of Taiwanese democracy is that the US and Taiwan share a common experience of democracy, including all its many disappointments, difficulties and dilemmas that cannot be easily ignored. ... While US officials often claim to be mystified by a Taiwanese move or maneuver on an issue related to identity or national character, the truth is that deep down, Americans of virtually every stripe understand the motivations behind initiatives that at the same time are seen as disruptive or even dangerous.

"What is sometimes forgotten in the occasionally tense to and fro

between Washington and Taipei is that unlike the previous era of US-Taiwanese diplomacy, when national authorities could act with much less concern about public scrutiny or opposition, the current leaders must be much more responsive to public sentiment and criticism. While it is true that, on occasion, Taiwanese leaders have taken steps that went against the advice given by Washington, these initiatives were usually undertaken with a specific domestic group of supporters in mind. In a sense, this is the essence of democracy.

"The challenge for this and the next generation of US and Taiwanese leaders will be to better appreciate the pressures and interests of the other. For the US president, it will mean a simultaneous desire to maintain a stable and durable understanding with China while at the same time seeking to preserve Taiwan's security and democracy. For the Taiwanese president, it will mean negotiating a complex path between domestic expectations for greater national identity and international standing, while taking account of the obvious desires of both Beijing and Washington to avoid actions that could trigger a crisis.

"Clearly, Washington and Taipei will have their hands full, but in the complex trilateral dialogue and diplomacy between Washington, Taipei and Beijing, it is clear that the common experience of democracy has created inevitable and undeniable connections between Taiwan and the US that cannot and should not be ignored. Indeed, it is these values, along with other strategic interests, that keep the US so closely engaged in the Western Pacific. So, as presidential campaigning continues in the US and Taiwan, it is important to keep these common political experiences in mind while both sides negotiate a complex future together."

YOUNG